

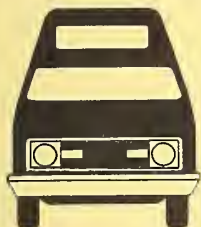
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Small City Transit

EVANSVILLE, INDIANA:

A Low Subsidy Transit Service



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JUL 14 1976

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March 1976

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
Urban Mass Transportation Administration
Office of Service and Methods Demonstrations
Washington, D. C. 20590

*Transportation
Systems Center*

Report no. DOT-TSC-UMTA-76-5 no. 9

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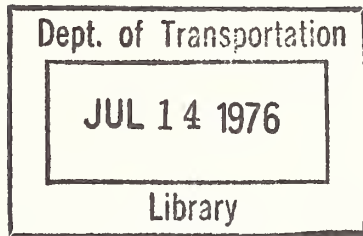
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Preface



This document was prepared by the Transportation Systems Center (TSC) as part of the information dissemination function of the Office of Service and Methods Demonstrations, Urban Mass Transportation Administration. This case study is one of thirteen studies of public transit systems in small communities and is intended to serve as an information resource for other communities in the process of planning or considering public transportation.

The information presented in this document is based on a visit to the site, interviews and phone conversations with the principals involved, and operating records obtained during 1975. The authors gratefully acknowledge the cooperation of local officials and transit operators at all of the sites selected for study, and of the TSC staff in compiling the information gained from these studies and assisting in its interpretation.

EVANSVILLE, INDIANA: A Low Subsidy Transit Service

Unacceptable financial performance has been a fatal problem for many public transit systems in the United States, particularly those in small and medium-sized communities. In this context, the fixed route bus service in Evansville, Indiana, is of special interest, because its financial record is exemplary in comparison with many similar transit systems. The present service was initiated in 1971, soon after a private company discontinued operations as a result of the city's refusal to increase its subsidy. The Evansville service, whose capital and operating costs are entirely locally funded, now carries over 4,000 passengers per day while covering 81 percent of its operating costs from fare revenues. The subsidy from local taxpayers amounts to less than 10 cents per ride.

Evansville, located in the southwestern corner of Indiana, is the largest city within a 150 mile radius. A substantial percentage of housing stock is forty years old and well-maintained. Evansville is only moderately dense in population (about 3,800 persons per square mile) and substantial tracts of undeveloped land exist within the city limits. The City is relatively large (population 138,000) but does not presently experience downtown auto congestion.

Although the Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area (SMSA) formally includes five counties, Evansville is an employment magnet for a nine county area. Within the central business district (CBD) of this county seat, 8,210 people are employed in governmental and commercial activities. Other employment centers include: an outlying Whirlpool plant (3,500 employees), Mead Johnson, three hospitals, and fringe area shopping centers. Evansville was described by its Transit Director as a strong labor town whose populace has "little tolerance for nonsense."

Development of Service

The City of Evansville operates under a Mayor-Council form of government. As the area's major urban center, Evansville is involved with the Southwestern Indiana and Kentucky (SWIK) Regional Council of Governments (formerly the Area Planning Commission) much of whose technical support is provided by the Evansville City Planning Department.

In 1969, public transit service in Evansville was delivered by one private carrier whose newest rolling stock dated back to 1953, and whose daily ridership was approximately 500. To preserve some form of public transit,

the Evansville City Council voted to pay the \$5,000 per month operating subsidy requested by the carrier. By 1970, the carrier felt that an increased level of subsidy was necessary. The City Council did not concur, and service was terminated in August, 1970. Skeletal service was provided for three months by a contract carrier.

Initiative to restore transit service came almost exclusively from Mayor McDonald with later support from the City Council. Mayor McDonald declared his commitment to transit and the Transit Board which was selected to manage the city's bus service. About 1,000 signatures were collected on letters and petitions from citizens requesting restoration of transit service.

Upon the request of the City Council Transit Committee, the Area Planning Commission (now SWIK) conducted a \$5,000 survey which resulted in the recommendation that small (19-24 passenger) buses be purchased (because 85% of the seats on the prior contract carrier's 45-passenger buses were empty). Minibuses were considered to be most appropriate for the type and level of transit demand present. Further analysis led to the recommendation that the system consist of 13 heavily travelled routes rather than the 26 routes initially envisioned.

The Mayor and City Council sought public involvement. Citizens were surveyed to determine their preference regarding bus size (which resulted in 1,500 responses) and were offered the opportunity to "name that bus system." They were encouraged to inspect various models of the minibuses on public display at the downtown Civic Center. The City Controller recommended that the buses be painted red, white, and blue for reasons of visibility as well as patriotic tradition.

After these studies and solicitation of public response, the City Council voted 8-1 to appropriate \$340,000 for the purchase of small buses. This sum was allocated in order to allow for the purchase of up to 26 buses, and to provide sufficient leverage in the event of Federal funding applications. At this meeting, the City Council President expressed his attitude towards transit: "...I feel any city without a transit system is declining. I believe it is evident from the same dilemma other cities throughout the nation are faced with, and without transit service they are dying from within."

After reviewing bids, Evansville contracted with the Flxible company for the purchase of 15 vehicles at a cost of \$203,492. Federal funding opportunities were explored, but the limited availability of funds, probable processing delays, and labor protection stipulations (especially the

number of workers to be "carried over") made this option seem unattractive.

It was decided that the urgency of the situation dictated that the Metropolitan Evansville Transit System (METS) be established as a division of the city's Public Works Department. In this way, the state authorization which would be required to establish an independent transit district could be by-passed. There was no effective opposition to this plan, and METS began service on twelve of the thirteen recommended routes August 31, 1971.

Service Format

The Transit Board selected Walter Burghard, who had worked for twenty years for the Mansfield, Ohio, bus operation to serve as METS Director. System planning responsibility rested with Director Burghard, who received documentation and census materials from the City Planning Department. Densely populated corridors and areas of transit dependence were identified through census tracts, and routes were planned to serve those areas. Routes were added to serve generating points as they developed. One such case of ad hoc route design was the provision of service to a new shopping center complex which was expected to generate both work and shopping trips, and has in fact become a point of service on six routes. Some high density areas remain unserved by METS, however, because of local terrain and the physical difficulty of maneuvering buses on unpaved roads.

METS service not only covered the main streets previously covered by the private carrier, but also served outlying areas of Evansville. In order to simplify service, METS headways were set at hour or half hour intervals rather than the 42 or 34 minute spacings used by the private carrier. Schedules were coordinated to facilitate transfers and all routes converged at the Central Business District (CBD) Civic Center pedestrian mall (Figures 1 and 2).

METS' sixteen buses operating on thirteen routes serve major residential areas, the central business district, and the local "miracle mile" shopping center. Evansville University is served by METS routes, but is not a major ridership generator. The system is basically a loop/interchange arrangement common in small communities, but unusual in a city of Evansville's size. Six routes are half-hour loops; seven are one hour loops. Service begins at 5:45 a.m. and ends at 5:45 p.m., Monday through Saturday. No evening service is offered since the level of crime is thought to be sufficiently high to eliminate transit demand. An interchange point in the miracle mile shopping center --



Figure 1. Bus Information Sign Located at Evansville Pedestrian Mall



Figure 2. Evansville Central Transfer Point

5.4 miles from the CBD interchange -- serves as the hub for circumferential transportation in Evansville's outskirts.

With METS operating as a city agency under the authority of the Public Works Department, major financial decisions such as the annual budget and the purchase of capital operating equipment are subject to the approval of the Public Works Board. The seven member Metropolitan Evansville Transit Board -- appointed for four year staggered terms by the mayor -- deals on a monthly basis with system operations: it approves expenditures and promotions, formulates the annual budget, and is party to the Council of Governments planning process.

METS employs an exact change, flat fare system with transfers at extra cost (35¢ fare, transfers 5¢). No passes are sold and no "gimmicks" are encouraged, although a merchant-sponsored shop/ride promotion was tried. Many of the "amenities" (schedules, radio spots) provided by and to METS are the result of entrepreneurial efforts by the transit management. Although the Transit Commissioners felt that a schedule/route brochure was necessary, no money was appropriated for this item. Fortunately, it was possible to persuade the Evansville Chamber of Commerce to prepare the route/schedule brochure as a community service. Such donated service arrangements allow METS to maintain a low deficit, but they rely heavily on initiatives by the system's management. There appears to be strict adherence to a "least cost" principle.

Much of the "planning" is informal: ridership trends and development areas are continually monitored, and routes are revised and modified to reflect changing demand. Long-range planning involves the City Planning Department and the Southwest Indiana and Kentucky Regional Council of Governments (SWIK). The Southwest Indiana and Kentucky Regional Council of Governments--essentially staffed by the City Planning Department--hopes to receive an UMTA Technical Studies grant in order to conduct a detailed study of the existing METS system, its financial position, socioeconomic characteristics of riders, future system expansion, and potential rerouting of the existing system. Although regional issues are of concern to METS, the primary service area will remain within the city limits as long as METS continues to be a locally-financed system.

At present, METS employs a staff of 43: 35 drivers, 4 mechanics, 1 foreman, 1 secretary/bookkeeper, 1 superintendent, and a Director of Transportation. Labor and management appear to have a good working relationship. One-third of the drivers work split shifts. Driver wages are \$3.75/hour, with fringe benefits of \$1.25/hour. System

characteristics and operating data are summarized at the end of this report.

Results and Future Plans

When METS service was initiated, the attitude toward ridership was one of "cautious optimism." Poor performance of the private carrier, coupled with a nine-month cessation of service, was expected to have effectively dampened demand. Hence, no impressive ridership response was expected instantly. Long term ridership growth has occurred, as shown in the following ridership trends over time (average daily ridership/month):

	<u>Average Daily Ridership</u>	
	<u>January</u> <u>(lowest ridership month)</u>	<u>November</u> <u>(highest ridership month)</u>
1971	1030	2730
1972	2460	3100
1973	2880	3330
1974	3260	3500
1975	3300	4280

In 1974, METS carried a total of 857,103 passengers at a cost of \$381,801.80, and realized \$310,554.47 in revenue. It is anticipated that the system will carry well over one million passengers in 1975, with a deficit somewhat larger than the \$71,247.33 of 1974.

A 1972 ridership survey showed that 42% of trips taken were work trips. A ridership survey is currently being designed for administration in the fall of 1975. The City Planning Department expects to find that its ridership profile reflects not the typical transit-dependent type, but the choice rider or worker.

The loop/interchange system renders METS highly visible to the public that is paying for it. Prior to the Chamber of Commerce preparation of the route/schedule brochure, a marketing survey was conducted to determine the level of public awareness of METS. Ninety-seven percent of the respondents were aware of METS' existence, 69% knew which route was most convenient to their home, 69% were aware of the existence of a downtown transfer point, and 54% knew the correct fare. Three-quarters of the sample did not ride

METS. Increased usage generated by the route/schedule brochure (i.e., knowledge of the system) has not been determined.

METS continues to experience ridership growth and attracts a significant number of workers as well as the more traditional elderly and youth riders. While increased ridership is desired, no aggressive attempts to induce modal switch are planned. According to the Mayor's special assistant, a 1% modal switch would overtax the system's present capacity. Ridership is relatively evenly distributed throughout the day; three minor peaks do occur.

Long-range plans for transportation in Evansville envision a City Transportation Department which would consolidate the demand-responsive handicapped/elderly services (whose annual deficit is greater than that of METS), rescue squad ambulance service, school bus service, and current METS service. This type of ambitious functional and administrative reorganization would require political support. The outcome of the fall, 1975, Mayoral election will have great bearing on the fate of this proposal.

In the short run, METS plans to acquire three additional buses in order to enlarge the active fleet to 19 vehicles. For the first time, Evansville will receive outside support. A Section 5 UMTA grant for \$118,759 has been approved (2 July 1975). Additional financial relief was provided on July 1 when municipally-owned transit systems became exempt from Indiana gross income tax and gas tax (8¢/gallon). The immediate service objectives are to increase frequency of service on hour loops, and generate a greater level of public confidence in transit safety. The safety issue is an important one since some citizens continue to view the service as crime-prone.

METS is a solid example of the significant edge potentially held by small community transit systems: if in the hands of competent management, small city operations can realize low deficits through contributed services, flexible union work rules, and continuing personal initiatives.

SUMMARY OF EVANSVILLE TRANSIT SYSTEM CHARACTERISTICS

DEMOGRAPHICS

Population in service area: 138,700 (City of Evansville)
Population density: 3,855 persons per square mile
Median household income: \$8,900
Cars owned per household: n/a
Percent carless households: 18%
Average distance to service: 68.3% of population
lived within 1/8 mile of a bus route,
according to a 1971/72 study

COVERAGE AND SERVICE

Number of routes: 13
Average route length (one-way): 8 miles
Average route time (one-way): 35 minutes
Time of service: 5:45 am - 5:45 pm, Monday thru
Saturday
Average headways: 30 min. on half, 60 min. on half
Number, types and average capacity of vehicles:
19 buses - 19 seats
Number of vehicles in service: 16

COST AND PRODUCTIVITY

Operating cost per month: \$31,817
Vehicle miles per day (300 days): 2,541.91
Vehicle hours per day: 149
Driver hours per day: n/a
Operating costs per vehicle hour: \$8.54
Operating costs per vehicle mile: \$0.50
Operating costs per passenger trip (one-way): \$0.37
Passengers per vehicle hour: 23
Passengers per vehicle mile: 1.35
Driver wage rate per hour: \$5.00
Capital cost: \$203,492 for 15 Flxettes

REVENUE AND SUBSIDY

Fares: 35¢ (base), 5¢ for transfers
Revenue per passenger: \$0.30
Subsidy per passenger: \$0.07
Operating ratio (cost/vehicle): 1.3

Lease or Buy Vehicles: Buy
Funding: Until 1975, financed by City of
Evansville; will receive Section 5
UMTA money

RIDERSHIP

Average passengers per weekday: 3,500
Ridership growth rate: Multiplied by 4 in
4-1/2 years and still increasing
Ridership composition (from 1972 data now
considered obsolete):
 young 17%
 elderly (over 60) 27%
Trip purpose (from 1972 data):
 Work 42%
 Shopping 21%
 Personal 11%
 School 5%
 Social 3%
 Other 18%

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